

Late

"A tropical depression rapidly gained strength today over the Caribbean, sending politicians throughout the Gulf Coast scrambling for cover. President Barack Obama issued a statement earlier this morning stating that Washington will be "watching Eight closely" and that "any and all preparations are being made to assist the residents of the Gulf Coast." Pressure quickly passed 1000mbar and Eight is expected to become a named storm by tomorrow morning."

Click.

"Depression Eight continues to climb in strength while the residents of many cities across the Gulf watch in fear. Each hope that the storm will hit somewhere else. Let's hope it doesn't hit anybody at all. Early estimates give no clear path for the storm."

Click.

"The Army Corps of Engineers intensified efforts today to put mud on the shores of Louisiana's coast, citing a press for time with the 2011 hurricane season pressing down on them."

Click.

Jeremy sighed. *All quiet on the home front since Gustav. Let's hope this one skims Texas!* He chuckled to himself as he pressed the OFF button on the remote. A blue light illuminated the peach walls and bounced off the mirror, highlighting several hurricane evacuation routes he had taped up.

"Jeremy, I'm home!" "Sarah!" Jeremy jumped off the couch and grabbed an empty bowl. He rushed to the sink and started brushing heavily against the crusted-on foods to no avail. "I've been at this all day, I have no idea how you do all this," he called to Sarah.

"The power of magic!" Sarah giggled and walked into the kitchen. In her left hand was the hand of Jessie, their little girl, and in her right hand about five thick bags of groceries. "Come on, unload the water while we stack up for Harvey."

"Harvey?"

"Eight when he grows up."

"Sarah, you can't believe--"

"Jeremy, there's no telling what it's gonna do and what happens if Marie can't hold us this time? What happens if Elmo moves out too? If all the hotels close up?"

“Sarah-“

“We’re making preparations now!”

Jeremy sighed and took a moment to memorize this entire confrontation in case of a future argument. Sure, he wouldn’t *win* the argument (what husband ever does?) but it would be nice to have some points.

“Fine.”

“Good.”

Three days later...

“What did I tell you, Jeremy?”

“Look, woman, when I say you can talk you can talk!”

“*Excuse me, Count Manliness?*”

“You heard what I said!”

As Jeremy and Sarah argued constantly, Jessie was becoming worried. The van was hot, their belongings were packed tighter than the contraflow traffic and just to top it off, Harvey decided it was going to strengthen into a major storm and head straight for New Orleans. Jessie didn’t know anyone that wasn’t from New Orleans – what would happen?

“Mama?”

“Yes, Jessie?”

“What’s gonna happen to Jamie?”

Jamie. Jamie was Jessie’s puppy. Jeremy and Sarah bought Jamie Jessie once Jack (the old terrier) had died. Unfortunately, they were forced to leave Jamie behind. There just wasn’t any room, and the hotel they rented didn’t allow dogs.

“Jamie’s gonna be alright. Don’t worry about her.”

“Okay...”

Jeremy was driving the van several hours west, to Dallas. They tried leaving early, but so did everybody else. They were stuck in traffic, halfway to Lake Charles

while Hurricane Harvey swerved up the Gulf. It was due to hit just west of New Orleans, putting the city in the worst possible place. In eight hours.

Ratatatatatatat.

“Sarah,” Jeremy whispered. “Sarah!”

“What?”

“It’s starting.”

Jeremy was afraid.

Twenty four hours later...

“Good morning, viewers, Robin Meade here on Morning Express. Hurricane Harvey, the deadly Category Four storm that was supposed to be the test for New Orleans’ new 100-year protection, has weakened to a Category One and moved into Mississippi.”

“That’s right, Robin. The major damage, however, did not come from the storm itself. The storm surge pushed north *with* the storm. Now, Louisiana’s coast is naturally protected from storm surge with barrier islands and marshes. Unfortunately, rising sea levels and human development have destroyed this protection.”

“Human development?”

“The Mississippi changes course just like other rivers. However, human settlers and their cities build levees to protect their farms from flooding. This is not natural for the River. Needed sediment and other earth aren’t picked up by the River anymore as much as it used to. Combine this with natural erosion and hurricane season and you’ve got a powder keg right next to a match.”

“Will this be the match?”

“I’m afraid so. Even though New Orleans flood protection was just finished, they can’t fight nature. Neither can the rest of Louisiana. The wetlands have eroded so much that the protection they used to give is all but gone. Now it’s just more water for the storm to push up. Anything north of Baton Rouge should be safe but, essentially, Louisiana just became a lot more dangerous with this storm.”

“Why... I’m sorry, but why did nobody think of this earlier?”

“We did, Robin. We did. Unfortunately, the politicians got caught up with getting money from oil companies that they refused to see the danger. Instead of the long-term

health of Louisiana, they exchanged it for a quick, fluctuating buck from the oil companies.”

“Are you saying that we *could* have done something about this?”

“Yes, Robin. And we still can. We need to act fast. If this was a few years ago, perhaps we’d have more time. We need to do whatever it takes – dumping mud, old trees and other natural mass down there seems like a simple option at first. We need to stop tapping into the Gulf for our dependence on oil, and we need to stop the pipes from running through the marsh, hampering the natural development. Finally, in places like New Orleans and Baton Rouge where we do have levees, it’s time to improve them right. The Army Corps of Engineers needs to get their act together. It might be too late for all of those who died during Harvey, but it’s not too late to start.”

“Thank you, Zeke.”

“My pleasure, Robin. God bless all of those who died.”

Robin sighed sadly at the TV camera. “Hurricane Harvey’s death toll has gone up well past Hurricane Katrina’s, with an estimated seven thousand dead. We still don’t have any real numbers, but we know that many people evacuating by car were swept up in the storm surge, and we have preliminary reports saying that the levees in New Orleans once again failed to hold back the rain, storm surge and sub-par levee combination. More after the break.”

Jeremy wiped a hand across his head when he clicked the TV off.

“Honey?”

“Yes, Jeremy?”

“Let’s not go back.”

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